

# KEN BUCK IS NOT THE TALIBAN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how the First Amendment is being politicized in electoral contests:

When the charge is made that someone in public office, or running for public office, is the enemy of the First Amendment, it is incumbent on those making the accusation to offer hard evidence. The latest flap concerns a video of some past remarks made by Ken Buck, a candidate for the U.S. Senate in Colorado, on the subject of religious liberty.

The First Amendment says that “Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Those words were penned by James Madison, and what he meant by the first provision (it is not a clause) was that (a) there could be no national religion, and (b) there could be no government favoritism of one religion over another. Ever since, this provision has been the source of debate. For example, the ACLU reads it as banning the display of a statue of Jesus on the ocean floor off the coast of Key Largo; it justifies its position by citing separation of church and state.

Oftentimes, those who reject the ACLU’s extremism reply that church and state are never mentioned in the First Amendment. They are correct. But does this mean that the foes of the ACLU’s position implicitly seek to entangle church and state? That’s quite a jump. For example, while Buck once said he opposes “the concept of church and state,” the anecdote he gave about extremists who call the Christmas tree a “holiday tree” (he erroneously attributed this to President Obama) suggests he is hardly the Christian Taliban some are making him out to be. Moreover, Buck has subsequently said, “we have separation of church and state,” emphasizing this doesn’t mean the two should never interact.

Thomas Jefferson used the metaphor of church and state in a private letter, but he also *intentionally* attended church services in the Capitol, a government building, two days later. And he even awarded federal funds to the Kaskaskias Indians to build a Catholic church. So if Buck is the Taliban, what does that make Jefferson?